

Well, there you have it! We continue today with the "kingdom of heaven is like" parables which we have been hearing over the past few weeks. We get another angle/understanding with each one. We started with the laborers who are hired and those hired at the end of the day get the same pay as those hired at the beginning. Then we had the two sons who were asked by their father to work - one says "no" then changes his mind and works; the other says "yes" but never goes. Last week we had the landowner who planted a beautiful vineyard and leased it out for care but the tenants gave him no produce and beat and killed those whom he sent, even when he sent his son. And today we have the wedding banquet for the king's son and those invited refused to come and again abused and even killed the messengers of invitation - we'd call them the prophets.

So what are the common denominators in all these parables? First, all are welcome - whether it be to work or to party. When the invitation is rejected it is extended to others. The kingdom of God is not a secret society to be figured out or to which only "certain" people are allowed. The Church is to be a reflection of that kingdom. Saints and sinners and everyone in between are welcome. The story said the king invited whomever his servants could find - the "*bad and good alike*."

So, all are invited - but that is the beginning. The second common denominator in these stories is that we can't rest on the invitation alone we have to respond to it with ready hearts and actions. That is what is represented by the guy who is kicked out of the wedding banquet because he didn't have the proper clothes. It's not about what we wear on the outside or what our past has been, it's about coming with open hearts and minds on the inside. The wedding garment is a sign of a changed heart and a commitment to good deeds in the name of the Lord. The goal is for the outside of us to match what is on the inside, right? One of my favorite sayings is: "I am everything I pretend to be." That's a lifelong goal, I think, but a worthy one. Showing up is the first step, but it is not the only step. Even to Church. We have to show up with intention, with ready and open hearts.

There's a story of an old monk who for many years prayed for a vision from God to strengthen his faith, but it never came. Until one day in

the midst of these prayers a vision of the kingdom of God was coming before him. But just as that happened, the monastery bell started to ring, which meant that the poor would be gathering at the door to receive whatever food the monks had to give that day - and it was the old monk's turn to bring the food for them. So he was torn. If he failed to show with food, the poor would quietly go away hungry, thinking the monks had nothing to give them that day. But he also really didn't want to leave this vision for which he had prayed all his life. However, before the bell stopped tolling he made his decision. He went to feed the poor. And well over two hours later he finally got back to his room and, much to his amazement, when he opened the door the wondrous vision of the Lord was waiting for him. As the monk dropped to his knees in joyful thanksgiving, the vision said to him, "My son, had you not gone off to feed the poor, I would not have stayed." (Lawrence LeShan)

As we heard from St. Paul: "*I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*" The invitation is just the beginning. When we show up we must be ready. When we go out from here we take the invitation and the Good News and good deeds with us into the world!